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At the dawn of the twenty-first century, our planet lies on a precarious downward spiral. Coming out of the most violent century in modern history, the beginning years of the new millennium have been wrought with great pain and suffering for not only humans but also the natural world. Ecosystems are destroyed, species go extinct and the earth is ravaged by an insatiable human desire for wealth and material goods. The lack of human concern for the well-being of the environment has become so much a part of daily reality that many humans are numb to the ecological degradation that is taking place.

Urban sprawl leads to increased pollution and the devastating loss of woodlands and wetlands. The sport utility vehicle craze of the 1990's has allowed auto manufactures to continue to produce cars that burn gas at an unconscionable rate. Relaxed emissions regulations have allowed dirty coal-fired power plants to continue pouring carbon dioxide, sulfur and other noxious gases into the atmosphere even though pollution reducing technologies and cleaner methods of producing energy exist. Our dependence on fossil fuels has led to the destruction of ecosystems worldwide as all corners of the planet are mined and drilled in an attempt to extract every possible drop of fuel from the earth. There is even little regard for our own species as human rights violations have reached atrocious levels with the globalization of industry that allows international companies to manufacture goods in third-world countries while paying slave-wages for labor. (NRDC: 2004)

Global warming, although vehemently rebutted as a myth by many of the world's largest polluters, has created a decade of the warmest mean earth temperatures in recorded history. If the current trend continues, substantial global climate changes will occur within the next hundred years. The polar icecaps, already thinning at an alarming rate, will continue to melt causing sea levels to rise worldwide and wiping out many of the coastal cities. Regional

climates will be drastically altered and although all nations will be affected to some degree, many of the poorer countries, ill equipped to handle these dramatic environmental changes, will suffer the most. Ecosystems will be destroyed and disease and famine will become more prevalent across the globe. (NRDC: 2004)

Recently, the United Nations addressed global warming in the Kyoto Accord. Providing international regulations on carbon dioxide emissions, the treaty would limit the amount of the greenhouse gas that could be released into the atmosphere each year by the participating countries. Signed by the United States and 54 other nations, President Bush announced during the early days of his presidency that the United States would back out of the agreement due to its economic burden on US industry. With the support of the most influential country in the world withdrawn, the Kyoto accord, the first and only international effort to curb greenhouse gas emissions, was effectively defeated. Despite resounding evidence showing the dangers of global warming, the proposal of any other international legislation addressing this issue is not expected in the near future. (NRDC: 2004)

Despite the predications of a grim future for the earth, human society continues to live in relative ignorance of the devastating effects that an anthropocentric lifestyle has on the natural world. Humans harm the environment in ways that are too numerous to count and if we continue to use natural resources at our current accelerated rate, within the next several centuries a vast majority of the creatures on the planet will be destroyed. It is foreseeable that human life itself will cease to exist if humans do not realize the devastating effects their ecological disregard has on the sustainability of the earth.

So how can we move off the path that ultimately leads to the annihilation of the earth? How do we build an ecological relationship between humans and the earth? A powerful community is needed to initiate this change and contemporary Christianity, which has been largely silent about the ecological crises, has great potential to be that community. But how are Christians to be convinced that at the heart of their faith is a message that supports a close ecological relationship with the earth? Does the Bible speak to ecology? What are the biblical relationships that develop between humans and the earth? Are they anthropocentric and individualistic, or do they value a more universal interconnection and interdependence between all entities of creation?

Finding an ecological relationship in the Bible between humans and the earth is a vital component of developing an environmental consciousness in Christianity. Perhaps the best place to search for this relationship is in the early

chapters of Genesis, the first book in the Bible. While these narratives do not immediately conjure images that focus specifically on interactions between humans and the earth, upon closer examination a primary emphasis is found on the developing ecological relationships within the newly created world.

In the Beginning: Erets in Genesis 1

The relationship that is established between humans and the earth at the beginning of the Bible is especially important for the development of an environmental theology. The Genesis 1 creation story is frequently referenced as a biblical validation of an anthropocentric relationship between humans and the earth. Culminating in Genesis 1.26-30 with the doctrine of Imago Dei, humans created in the image of God, and a command from God for humankind to rule over and subdue the earth and all its creatures, Genesis 1, at first glance, clearly contradicts the ecological principles of intrinsic value, interconnection and interdependence. Primacy is given to one species.

Is it possible that the common perceptions about this text are wrong? When anthropocentric assumptions are taken into suspicion and this narrative is examined for an ecological foundation, it is transformed from a narrative about the anthropocentric creation of humankind into a story about geophany, the manifestation and revelation of erets, earth. The account of God creating humans is certainly not the climax of the story but becomes a sharp contrast in the plot and perspective of the narrative. The primary focus is the revelation of the earth, not the creation of humans, and the early relationship that is established between all entities, including humans, of the new creation is based on interconnection, interdependence and intrinsic value. (Habel: 2000, 35)

The story about the primordial earth begins with erets hidden and awaiting its revelation. "Now the earth was a formless void, there was darkness over the deep, with a divine wind sweeping over the waters" (Gen 1.2). Often an assumption is made at this point in the creation story that the darkness is sinister, evil or chaotic. God is seen during creation as conquering and subduing this chaos much in the same way humans are called to subdue things within the environment that are naturally chaotic or wild. Misinterpreting this passage in this manner has severe ecological ramifications when humans cite this passage to validate the treatment of the natural world in a similar manner.

But the darkness in Genesis 1.2 is not a condemnation of things that are "untamed," but rather is the benign primordial state of an *erets* that awaits revealing. Three central characters of the subsequent story are already present

in the darkness; *Elohim*, the waters and earth. The presence of *Elohim*, God, is defined by a breath or spirit (*rauch*) moving across the waters within the darkness. The key word in this text is "within;" (Wyatt: 1993, 543) at no point does the divine spirit become separated from the primordial *erets* and the perpetual embrace of God is an integral part of the developing relationships in the creation story. The *rauch* of *Elohim* is described using the verb *merachepet* (hovering). Translation of this term varies, but for an ecological reading of the Bible we shall assume that the verb is not being used to describe the chaotic hovering of a storm of mighty wind (von Rad: 1961, 47), but is used in a similar fashion as Deut. 32.11 where it describes an eagle, wings spread, hovering over its young in an act of protection. With movement suggestive of the wingspread of a mother bird over her young, *Elohim* is envisioned as a nurturing element from the very beginning of the story. (Habel: 2000, 37)

The second component of the primordial world is the waters, described as *tehom*, "the deep." Remaining hidden in darkness with the movement of God, the waters refer to primordial oceans that have yet to be ordered into known seas. (Habel: 2000, 37) What remains ecologically important in this passage is the lack of any indication that these waters are considered chaotic or threatening forces. Covering *erets* and co-existing in the darkness with the movement of *Elohim*, they are not forces to be tamed by God but remain part of the benign primordial state that has yet to be revealed.

Earth, the third component in the primordial creation story becomes a dominant subject and primary focus in this narrative. Described as *tohu waabohu*, the earth is barren of life and vegetation and lacks the habitation to make it productive. Both the biblical context and extra-biblical parallels suggest that the phrase *tohu wabohu* in Genesis 1.2 has nothing to do with 'chaos' and simply means 'emptiness' and refers to the earth which is an empty place, i.e. 'an unproductive and uninhabited place.' (Tsumura: 1989, 43) Norman Habel expands on why this passage is frequently considered an allusion to chaos by suggesting that the chaos connection was made by linking *tehom* with the Babylonian chaos deity Tiamat who, in the Babylonian myth Enuma Elish, was conquered by Marduk so he could establish order. "Genesis 1, from this perspective, involves God's creative deeds, designed to overcome the forces of chaos and create a cosmos." (Habel: 2000, 38)

Several interesting associations are made when searching for motives to interpret the initial stages of creation as a conquest of chaos. Perhaps it was the drive of biblical scholars to find the setting of biblical texts in the wider context

of Near Eastern mythology or to make connections between the other biblical texts where this theme is incorporated. Habel suggests that the "conquest of a threatening chaos—associated with female forces like Tiamat—by the rational word of a powerful male deity appealed to our gendered view of the world. God's control over chaos could then be seen as precedent for the control of the earth assigned to *adam* in the latter half of Genesis 1." (Habel: 2000, 39) Also suspect is a dualistic contrast between order and chaos that appeals to the Western anthropocentric patterns of thought where weaker elements are overcome by the might of the stronger.

But the portrayal of the primordial state of the earth in Genesis 1 does not have a necessary connection with the chaos tradition, rather it is a story of manifestation an revelation. Habel cites a paragraph by E. J. von Wolde that supports this position:

> This is the primeval situation: no 'nothing,' nor a chaos that needs sorting out, but a situation of 'before' or 'not yet' in view of what is coming. Even God is not yet the Creator, but an indefinable spirit of God moving on the face of the waters. These are the main characters of the story to come. (von Wolde: 1998, 25)

Envisioning the earth as a chaotic realm that was conquered by God in creation and must continue to be conquered by humans in the contemporary world has devastating effects on the environment. For an ecological relationship between humans and the earth to be established it is necessary to discredit the chaos interpretation. Regardless of the motives for this "conquer of chaos" theme, a close examination of the text in Genesis 1.1-2 reveals that the primordial setting of the earth was not wrought by turbulence and chaos; rather it was devoid of conflict as it benignly awaited manifestation.

The transformation of the primordial earth begins with the voice of *Elohim* in Genesis 1.3; *Elohim*, once hidden as a breath in the darkness is now revealed as a word of creation. The first action of *Elohim's* word is to separate darkness from light, a prerequisite for the earth to be made visible. Hiding in this distinction between light and dark is another emerging duality; light becomes a positive advancement in the conquest of chaos while darkness remains a reminder of the turbulent primordial state. "Darkness is not evil or threatening; it is not a residue from a threatening chaos. It is part of everything that is declared good by *Elohim*." (Habel: 2000, 39) The division of darkness and light does not advance a dualistic ordering of the universe; rather it expresses domains of time and function, complimentary realities within the natural order.

Along with the creation of light, the waters that hid erets from view were restructured. Taking place in two parts, *Elohim* on the second day constructs the *raqia* (dome) that is named *shemayim*. (Habel: 2000, 41) This point in the text is often interpreted as a divergence between the earthly realm and the heavenly realm. This creates an ordered hierarchy that separates a transcendent God from the earth. Contributing to a distant relationship between humans and God, this same divide perpetuates a disconnection of humans from the natural order. But the reference made here is not to a celestial heaven in a distant place, but an immediate sky that is part of the visible ordering of reality.

The sky functions as both a place where the primordial *tehom* can be relocated (as rain and clouds) and as an open space for the appearance of the earth, thus on the third day, erets rises from the waters:

> And God said, 'Let the waters under the sky be gathered in one area, and let the dry domain appear.' And it was so. And God called the dry domain erets. And the waters God gathered together God called seas. And God saw that it was good. (Gen. 1.9-10)

Elohim, manifesting as both breath and voice, has taken on another unique characteristic in "seeing" the earth. When God pronounces that both the light and *erets* are "good," God has not commanded them to be good, but instead has discovered them to be good. With *Elohim's* pronouncement of earth being "good," the intrinsic value of the earth is discovered. There was no commandment for the earth to be good. It was not necessary for God to make it good. The earth is good not because of a divine act but because *erets* is good; through its own natural intrinsic value that has been identified and seen as good by God.

After its appearance, the earth is activated; *Elohim* speaks to the earth on the fourth day and it brings forth vegetation and seeds. It is not the command of God that is the primary catalyst for this creation event but the earth itself that is the source for its own plant life. "When God activates the *erets*, the potential life forces within the earth emerge as fauna and flora of all kinds. The revealed *erets* is the dormant source of living creatures." (Habel: 2000, 43) The earth does not passively react to the orders of God but actively takes part as a co-creator with God.

This pattern is repeated as the other living things emerge from the earth. On the fifth day the water and sky are activated, with creatures coming forth both within the waters and above the land of the earth and on the sixth day animal life emerges on erets. "Earth is the source, home and haven of living creatures. Earth is a co-creator with *Elohim*." (Fretheim: 1992, 14) Given the divine blessing to pro-create and multiply, earth becomes not only a home but also is the provider

of the livelihood needed for the continued existence of these organisms. Earth does not just watch this creation take place but actively interacts with God to allow life to emerge. The idea that *erets* is both a physical and spiritual source of life is a powerful ecological image that creates a deep sense of interconnection between all living and non-living entities of creation.

At the conclusion of the sixth day, the earth has been fully revealed and the relationship between *Elohim* and the new creation has been established. God has "seen" the earth to be good, signifying that the intrinsic value of the world is not a divine mandate but a pre-existing condition that has been experienced by God. The earth has been infused with a sense of balance and harmony that defines the development of a caring relationship of interconnection and interdependence between all entities of creation.

But the creation of humans in Genesis 1.26-30 suddenly stands in direct conflict with the earth story. Habel cites five ways that the appearance of humans diverges from the context of the earth creation story:

> 1) Human beings, unlike all other living things, do not emanate from earth as the logic of the story would seem to dictate, but are created by fiat of Elohim, differentiating human beings from all other forms of life.
> 2) Humans are further differentiated from other creatures by virtue of being made imageo dei, in the image of the celestial being of Elohim.
> 3) The function of special form and status of human beings as images of God is to give them dominion over all other living things on the earth. The focus moves from erets as the source of living creatures to adam, a new creature with power over all the life that has emanated from erets. This devalues the earth by making it subservient to human beings.
> 4) The fertility blessing given to all life assumes a new dimension when extended to humans. Not only are humans to be fruitful, multiply and fill earth; they are also authorized to subdue the earth. The verb used for "subdue" is kabash, a word associated with forceful subjugation, enslavement (Jer. 34.11; Neh. 5.5), crushing hostile nations (2 Sam. 8.11) and the rape of a women (Est. 7.8). It is difficult to find a gentle ecological interpretation for this highly anthropocentric and abrasive verb.
> 5) The orientation of the human creation story is highly hierarchical with humans authorized to rule over other creatures and subdue the earth.
>
> (Habel: 2000, 46-47)

It seems that there is nothing benign about the introduction of humans to the creation story; especially when the humans are given authority to not only rule over but also subdue the earth. The stories are conflicted; the earth story exhibits cosmic harmony rooted in the intrinsic value of all things associated with erets, while the human story creates dualism, hierarchy and exploitation at the expense of both earth and its creatures.

The dominion narrative is at the foundation of the contemporary notion of human separation from and subjugation of the environment. With a divine mandate to subdue the earth and its creatures, humans, especially in the last century, have done severe damage to the natural order in pursuit of self-centered and anthropocentric interests. Hiding under the guise of divine legitimacy, the society of the mechanistic model time and time again cites the Genesis 1.26-30 text to substantiate exploitation of the earth.

But is it possible that this seemingly sudden anthropocentric focus within the creation story is caused by a severe misinterpretation of the text? Can Genesis 1.26-30 be redeemed so that the creation of humans is linked in continuity with the harmonious creation described in the preceding passages of Genesis? The answer is unequivocally yes! The misinterpretations of the text that have subordinated non-human elements of the world can be replaced with an understanding of the text that focuses on the basic ecological network of interconnection and interdependence between all of creation.

The first misinterpretation of the text focuses on an exclusive divine mandate for humans, above all other creatures, to multiply and fill the earth. It is necessary to point out that the first divine speech about procreation is actually given to the birds and creatures of the sea, and linguistically contains the same imperative that is later given to humans. This blessing of procreation therefore is not exclusive to humankind as an anthropocentric interpretation of the dominion narrative might imply. Although God tells humans to 'be fruitful and multiply,' they are not blessed any differently than all the other creatures of the earth; in fact they are blessed after all the other creatures of the earth. Humans cannot claim the vocation of reproduction only for themselves, rather they must share it equally with all of creation.

Perhaps the most damaging misinterpretation of the text however is found in Genesis 1.28 when humans are called to rule and subdue the earth. Redeeming this polemic is difficult, but a close analysis of the text reveals overlooked subtleties. The language used in this passage is primarily monarchal and associated with kings. Mark Brett states that within the Israelite tradition, one frequently finds a connection between the ideal king and the fertility of the land. Psalm 72, for example, interweaves the expectations that the ideal king is one who defends the weak and afflicted (Ps. 72.2, 4, 12-14) with the claim that this rule is characterized by prosperity and fertility (Ps. 72.3, 6-7, 16-17). In Psalm 72, we even find the impossibly utopian expectation that the Israelite king 'will rule from sea to sea, and form the River to the ends of the earth' (Ps. 72.8), echoing the human vocation in Genesis 1. (Brett: 2000, 77-78)

If the comparison between these two passages is taken seriously, humanity is called to rule over all the earth as an ideal Israelite king might; at no point is there an expectation that this rule will entail the belligerent conquest of the natural order as if it were an enemy. This interpretation Brett introduces makes it clear that humans are not at all called to 'multiply' and 'subdue' the earth as conquerors; instead the author of this passage envisaged a relationship between humans and the world of stewardship and care. Verbs such as 'rule,' are re-interpreted positively as 'caring for the weak.' Humans are called to care for the earth in the same way a compassionate king would for his people; paying particular attention to the marginalized. (Brett: 2000, 77) At no point are humans called to exploit, subjugate, marginalize or destroy any part of the natural order.

As further support for the inclusion of humans in a relationship of care and interconnection with the earth, at the end of Genesis 1, God creates the Sabbath, a day of divine rest that is declared holy. While it is not actively practiced in Genesis, the theory is passed down as a divine imperative into later books of the Bible. (Wallace: 2000, 56) Although the Sabbath has become interpreted with an increasingly anthropocentric focus in contemporary society, evidence from the Bible shows it had unambiguously ecological implications in the Pentateuch. Deuteronomy 5.14 envisions a rest for domesticated animals, not just humans. The land rights in Jubilee legislation, a special extrapolation of Sabbath principles with included rest for the earth, is described in Leviticus 25-26 and even more striking, Leviticus 26.34-35 suggests that a human exile might even be necessary at times for the land to enjoy a complete Sabbath renewal! (Brett: 2000, 79) Sabbath rights, in continuity with all other divine imperatives in the early creation story are not limited to just humans, but are extended to include all of creation.

The Genesis 1 creation narrative establishes an important relationship between humans and the earth characterized by intrinsic value, interconnection and interrelation that becomes an important foundation for the development of an ecological consciousness. The mechanistic model, working to advance anthropocentric interests in the contemporary world, has placed an emphasis on a human-centered creation. But it is clear that humans are only a small part of a much larger picture. Emerging from the text is a complex description of creation that is defined by the formation of interconnected relationships between God, earth and all entities of creation. Humans are not called to subdue the earth but instead humans are invited to become stewards of an intrinsically valued natural world. As the discussion of Genesis continues, it will become increasingly

apparent that interconnection and intrinsic value define the relationship that humans are expected to maintain with the earth.

Genesis 2-3: The Anthropocentric Fall of Humans

Unlike the earth emphasis in the Genesis 1 narrative, human beings are the predominate focus of Genesis 2-3. The plot of the story begins with an alternative creation story that focuses not on the natural elements of the earth but on the creation of humans. While it may seem at first that there is very little connection between a human-centered creation narrative and an ecological consciousness, it will be seen that throughout Genesis 2-3 the human relationship with the environment is once again emphasized by the author of this passage as an important theme.

Created from the mud and named *adam*, earth creature, humankind is derived in Genesis 2 both in body and name from *adamah*, the earth. God plants a garden in Eden and *adam* is placed in this garden to "work it and keep it." (Gen. 2.15) The relationship that *adam* shares with Eden correlates closely to the relationship humans have with the earth as stewards of creation; the garden will provide sustenance for *adam* in return for his nurturing and care. Interconnection and interdependence are the primary focus of the first human interaction with the natural environment.

The author of this passage is careful to point out that although humans are called to be stewards of creation, there is a human impact on the physical world. Applied to the relationship between *adam* and Eden, "working and keeping" the garden is very different from our modern conception. The word gan, Hebrew for garden, is used to describe where *adam* is placed by God. (Newsom: 2000, 64) But this story takes place before agriculture in the modern sense; therefore Eden is not a garden of tilled soil with rows of plants, but a wild forest with trees and fruit. "Keeping" of this pre-agricultural forest is dissimilar to a modern garden and J.B. Callicott suggests that although there is human attention given to the ecosystem, it implies something more like "pruning and raking." (Callicott: 1991, 125) Therefore paradise is described as the existence of *adam* as gatherer and tender of a forest that in turn will provide him with the sustenance needed for life. By recognizing that not only was there a time before vegetation was able to grow, but also a time before human beings worked the soil; it is clear that the author was aware that human presence affects the environment. (Newsom: 2000, 63) The description of a pre-tilled earth is emphasized by its juxtaposition with the birth of agriculture which will be addressed in greater detail at the end of the Genesis 2-3 narrative.

As the story develops, it occurs to God in Genesis 2.18 that *adam* might be lonely, so God creates the animals. Envisioning that a close bond of companionship can be formed between the animals and *adam*, God creates all the living creatures in the same way *adam* was created, from *adamah*. But when the animals are subsequently marched past adam to be named, *adam* does not find the special companionship that God had intended.

It is important at this point to note that when reading this passage ecologically it is initially troubling that God allowed *adam* to have the control and power of naming these creatures. But when the language of the passage is closely examined it becomes evident from the author's use of word plays that the naming is about identity, not power. "The earth creature (*adam*) is related to earth (*adamah*) because his name is. So when God brings the animals to *adam* to see what he would call them, it is a question of recognition, not power." (Newsom: 2000, 66)

Because *adam* fails to find companionship among the other creatures, God decides that a special kind of company is necessary to alleviate *adam's* loneliness. This special connection is made through the intimacy of a common identity separated by the slightest degree, something made possible by gender. The companion God creates for *adam* is made from his own flesh; *ishah* (woman) taken from the being of *ish* (man). (Newsom: 2000, 67) The author once again uses a play on words to emphasize this close identity yet slight difference between *ish* and *ishah*; it is described in the same way *adam* is related to *adamah*. The relationship between man and woman is characterized by the same interconnection and harmony that unites humans, animals and all other entities to their ultimate derivation in the common source of *adamah*.

The plot of the story shifts at this point to the temptation of humans by a serpent. Of all the trees in Eden only two are specifically mentioned, the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and bad (Gen. 2.8-9). Humans are forbidden to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and bad a serpent convinces the humans to consume the fruit of this tree. While this event does not initially appear significant for the environment, blame for the first human sin has not only been solely focused on the human involvement but also has been extended to include the serpent. This creates a sense of blame that animals are supposed to share for human sins and greatly hinders the development of interconnection between humans and the natural world.

But another word play created by the author within this text negates any interpretation of the serpent as an evil creature and redeems the erroneous polemic that animals should be held partially responsible for the first human

sin. Man and woman are described as both not aware and not ashamed to be *arumim*, naked, when they are created. That is until the serpent, which is referred to as *arum*, cleverest of all animals, suggests they eat from the forbidden tree. (Newsom: 2000, 67) Humans have become aware of being *arumim* because they listened to a creature that is *arum*. The serpent, contrary to many interpretations, is never described as evil, it is simply clever, and it initiates a dialogue with the woman about the tree of knowledge of good and evil. [1] Telling the woman, "You won't actually die. God knows that on the day you eat from it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods, knowing what is good and what is bad" (Gen. 3.5), the serpent entices the woman to share and eat the fruit with *adam*. But at no point does the serpent force humans to eat the fruit so responsibility for the first human sin ultimately falls on the humans that physically consumed the fruit. Although the serpent is *arum*, it, along with all other non-human creatures, is not evil and should not be held responsible for human actions.

After eating the fruit, Adam and Eve immediately become aware of their nakedness, but the emphasis of this awareness should not be placed on an awakened sexuality. Sexual difference is apparently discovered by Adam when he first saw Eve and called her *ishah*; additionally, there is no reason to believe that Adam and the woman were chaste in Eden. The discovery of nakedness is important only because it is a concept that radically distinguishes humans from other animals. Bears and lions cannot be naked in the same way humans can be naked; animals are naked but not ashamed; the first thing Adam and the woman do upon discovering their nakedness is to make clothes.

Carol Newsom describes in detail the ecological importance of this event and concludes that it becomes even clearer why God had originally brought the animals and birds to *adam* as possible companions. At that time the great gulf that divides human beings from the rest of animals had not yet opened. But when the eyes of the man and woman were opened, the common ground that had united human beings with the other creatures is broken. (Newsom: 2000, 68-69) Adam and the woman are now separated from animals by virtue of the ability to see themselves, to be self-aware and self-conscious; human beings now have a characteristic that they share with no other living creatures.

When God finds out that humans have eaten the fruit, he curses them and banishes them from Eden. But why is self-consciousness something God wanted to keep from other living beings? Callicott provides the possibility that once aware of themselves, the man and woman may treat themselves as an axiological point of reference. The text suggests by its very silence on any alternative to Yahweh's banishment, or any compromise, and by the finality of that banishment, that

once aware of themselves they will inevitably treat themselves as an intrinsically valuable hub to which other creatures and the creation as a whole may be referred for appraisal. Self-consciousness is a necessary condition for self-centeredness, self-interestedness. (Callicott: 1991, 123-124)

Callicott is describing the root of ecological sin, anthropocentric self-interest, which creates a sharp divide from the relationships established in God's initial creation. Each living creature still has a common origin in *adamah*, but with the development of self-awareness, humans can now distinguish between what is pleasing or not based on human values. This imbalance between humans and the earth makes the ramifications of this event severe for the other living creatures that will suffer as a result of human self-interest.

The punishment of humans for this original sin closely reflects the developing alienation of humans from the natural environment. Woman is now the only female species in the world that regularly has a dangerous and painful childbirth due ironically to the human brain that creates a large and overdeveloped head; ease in childbirth is no longer a shared characteristic between all animals. Adam's punishment is tied to the birth of agriculture as the availability of the human food source is changed; because a degree of alienation exists between *adam* and *adamah*, the ground no longer provides easy and plentiful sustenance for human beings. Cursed to grow predominately thorns and thistles, the ground requires much human hardship and toil to be coaxed into producing even the slightest amount of food. The expulsion from Eden aptly symbolizes humankind's historic shift from one ecological place to another, from what in anthropological terms we would call a hunter-gather state to an agricultural one. (Newsom: 2000, 70-71)

Sent from Eden, humans have developed a capacity of self-awareness that allows not only positive characteristics such as richness of culture to emerge but also the darker manifestations of the human consciousness filled with greed and violence. God's original intention for human beings as tenders and keepers of a harmonious creation is lost and the path back to the Garden of Eden has been blocked. But hope for the restoration of the original order cannot be abandoned because with the emergence of human self-awareness comes the development of moral agency, the ability of humans to make choices. The self-consciousness that makes these choices possible is the same element that gives humans the potential to move from a narrow path of destructive self-interest to a more benign ambition dedicated to nurturing and protecting all entities of the earth; the fall into anthropocentrism can be corrected and the rightful relationships between humans and the earth can be restored when humans choose to concentrate not solely on their own lives, but also on the lives of all the creatures of the world.

If the ecological message that is evident as a primary theme in the first chapters of Genesis is taken seriously, then it is necessary for humans to interact with the earth in a way that is vitally concerned with the well-being of all entities of creation. This new reality calls for a voice to rise from within the world community that no longer ignores the natural world but instead addresses the ecological crisis. By living this new reality, humans can move off of the dangerous path we have taken toward environmental catastrophe and work together in harmony for the protection and sustainability of life on our planet for thousands of years to come.

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(Footnotes)

[1] An important distinction should be made here pertaining to the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Despite the traditional translation, the Hebrew words mean good and bad in a broad sense. Thus, what is truly described here is power of the tree to bestow the ability to make decisions, to make distinctions and to choose. (Newson: 2000, 67)